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DEPT FOR EUR/AGS, INR/EU, AND EUR/PPD FOR YVETTE SAINT-ANDRE

OSD FOR COMMANDER CHAFFEE

WHITEHOUSE FOR NSC/WEUROPE

E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: [KPAO](#) [AU](#) [OPRC](#)

SUBJECT: AUSTRIAN MEDIA HIGHLIGHTS: January 19, 2007

Students Contemplating Further Action

¶1. Representatives of Austria's Student Union are considering what further action to take in their opposition to university tuition fees. They are reported to be considering boycotting the fees, organizing a popular petition and holding regular demonstrations. Meeting in Linz yesterday, the leadership of the Austrian Students Association OeH unanimously demanded the abolition without replacement of the university tuition fees, ORF online news writes. In a resolution they published Thursday evening, the student representatives warned that they would consider boycotting the fees, should negotiations and protests fail to bring about results. The model proposed by the new Austrian government that students could do community service instead of paying tuition fees was a "half-baked" measure, the student representatives continued, stressing that it was "not an improvement, but the institutionalization of the precarious employment situation" of many students.

Strache's War Games

¶2. Pictures have emerged showing FPÖ boss Heinz-Christian Strache engaged in paramilitary "war games" with members of far-right political groups. Strache is downplaying the significance of the photos, but Austrian media speculate they could indicate a power struggle within the party between Strache and FPÖ MP Ewald Stadler, as it was he who made public the images. Like all Austrian media, liberal daily Der Standard reports on the "war games photo affair," which - the daily believes -- is likely to put FPÖ leader Heinz-Christian Strache under pressure. On ORF television, Strache defended himself; downplaying the matter as "a harmless paintball game" he had played as a youth, and as a "storm in a teacup." All Austrian media argue that the issue indicates an "open power struggle over the FPÖ's leadership" between Strache and his party colleague Ewald Stadler. Mass-circulation tabloid Oesterreich quotes Strache as claiming on ORF television that Stadler was behind the photos' publication. The daily also reports on alleged massive differences between Strache and Stadler and suggests the affair could lead to a breaking test for the FPÖ.

Haider to Return to Parliament?

¶3. Carinthian Governor Joerg Haider in an interview with an Austrian daily has announced his intention to return to the federal parliament as an MP. Following stiff criticism from Administrative Court President Clemens Jabloner of his refusal to put up all the required bi-lingual town signs in Carinthia, Haider attacked the

grand coalition, claiming the SPOe and the OeVP were intent on carrying out what he described as "an ethnic and political cleansing" in Austria. He would "strike back," however, and "launch an initiative to break the grand coalition's power binge." Despite the criticism of Administrative Court President Jabloner and his suggestion proceedings could be launched to remove Haider from office because of his stance on town signs, the Carinthian Governor emphasizes he is ruling out his retirement from politics. Quite the contrary: In an interview with mass-circulation tabloid Oesterreich, Haider said he was "on the list, and could return to Parliament immediately. I won't just sit there and watch those people who have ended up in top positions through nepotism launch a campaign of revenge against everyone who is not a member of the SPOe or the OeVP."

Meanwhile, independent provincial daily Salzburger Nachrichten reports on rumors that the estranged parties FPÖe and BZÖe could be discussing rapprochement. The daily writes about an alleged "pact" between BZÖe leader Joerg Haider and FPÖe boss Heinz-Christian Strache, which envisages FPÖe support for the BZÖe in the next provincial elections in Carinthia in exchange for a BZÖe seat in the federal parliament for the FPÖe.

The Embassy Fence

¶4. A Vienna television station publishes a report on the construction work for the security fence currently being put up in Boltzmanngasse outside the US Embassy building. Vienna city television station plus TV published a report on the security fence project at the US Embassy in Vienna. The building of the 2.8m-high fence has attracted criticism from Boltzmanngasse residents, some of whom have suggested the Embassy should move to the outskirts of Vienna instead, says plus TV. Assistant Public Affairs Officer Katherine M. Perez explained, however, that it was far more convenient for everyone that the US Embassy remain where it is. Plus TV adds that some of the opposition to the fence might be down to general anti-Americanism, and has nothing to do with the actual project. The authorities for the 9th district are also convinced that anger among the residents will die down following the conclusion of the fence's construction in February. The costs for the new security barrier are borne entirely by the US Embassy, plus TV notes.

Pentagon Chief Criticizes Iran

¶5. America's new Defense Secretary Robert Gates has criticized the Iranian leadership for having "gone too far" in the dispute over Tehran's nuclear program. This had led to "serious concern" in the region over Tehran's intentions, Gates added. He made the statement in a meeting with Saudi Arabia's King and the Emir of Qatar. In his criticism of the Iranian leadership, US Defense Secretary Robert Gates conceded that Iran may currently believe it has been given a "tactical opportunity," because of the United States' problems in Iraq, but he pointed out that the US is still a "very powerful country," according to ORF online news. Asked about a possible US dialogue with Tehran, the Pentagon chief replied that Washington needed to boost its negotiating position first. At this point, there was nothing the US had to offer to Iran, which would automatically relegate it to the position of petitioner in any negotiation, ORF online news quotes. In related news, ORF radio says that a bi-partisan group of US congressmen has put forward legislation to prevent President Bush attacking Iran without the authorization of Congress. The move comes amid concern that President Bush may choose to confront Iran rather than engage it, as he has recently made the decision to send a second Navy task force to the Persian Gulf. Also, last week, US troops arrested Iranian officials in northern Iraq. Kilner